

**LABOR MANAGEMENT**

By James Carrabba

Tips from New York Center for Agricultural Medicine & Health (NYCAMH)

# Importance of Farm Safety Program Planning

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous industries in the United States. According to the National Safety Council, in 2010, agriculture had the highest fatality rate of any industry in the country at 26.9 deaths per 100,000 workers. This is much higher than the average fatality rate for all US industries, which was 3.0 deaths per 100,000 workers. Although a Safety and Health Program is not mandated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), having a safety and health program makes good business sense. Work-related injuries and illnesses are very costly to any business. Consider what one lost work-day due to an injury could cost an employer in terms of both direct and indirect expenditures:

- The productive time lost by an injured employee, and by other employees and supervisors attending the victim(s)
- The time spent cleaning up and starting up the operation interrupted by the incident
- The time to hire or to retrain other individuals to replace the injured worker until he or she returns
- The time and cost for repair or replacement of any

damaged equipment or materials

- The cost of continuing all or part of the employee's wages in addition to compensation
- The morale and efficiency among your employees may be reduced
- The rates you pay for workers' compensation insurance may increase
- The time of completing paperwork generated by the incident
- The cost of any potential lawsuit and/or OSHA fine

As you can see, the real cost of an injury can far exceed the medical costs alone. If you would like to reduce the costs and risks associated with workplace injuries and illnesses, you need to assign safety and health the same priority that you give to productivity. Safety and health policies should not be something that is just added to comply with government regulations, but something that is a main component of your farm's business philosophy. Today's progressive business owners recognize the direct correlation between having an effective safety and health program with reduced injuries and illnesses, and an overall more productive work environment. To assist farms with safety program planning, the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) has developed some template farm safety and health program materials to reduce injuries and illnesses on your farm.

Effective safety programs include the following elements:

## FYI

■ Contact Jim at 800-343-7527 ext 239 or [jcarabba@nycamh.com](mailto:jcarabba@nycamh.com). NYCAMH, a program of Bassett Healthcare Network, is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.



## THE MANAGER

- Management commitment and employee involvement
- Hazard identification and assessment
- Hazard prevention and control
- Regularly recurring safety and health training
- Safety program evaluation

Having appropriate controls in place when designing the prevention and control program, apply controls following this hierarchy:

1. Engineering controls
2. Work practices
3. Administrative controls
4. Personal protective equipment (PPE)

**Engineering Controls** – are any means to eliminate the hazard by removing the hazard from the method, material, structure or process. This is the most effective way to ensure employees' health and safety. Some examples of engineering controls could include ventilation hoods over welding areas, ROPS on tractors, PTO shielding, spray cabs on self-propelled sprayers or tractors, hydraulic interlock systems on skidsteers.

**Work Practices** – use work rules and work practices to train personnel to be aware of a hazard and to follow safe work procedures to avoid it. Employees must be trained to understand why these rules and work practices are necessary, and how to use them to protect themselves and others.

**Administrative Controls** – are the means to limit the time/duration of the exposure. Administrative controls are only effective in certain cases. When they are used, a schedule should be developed and strictly followed.

**Personal Protective Equipment** – PPE is the last line of defense. If the previous steps cannot be instituted, then employees must be required to use the appropriate personal protective equipment to shield themselves against the hazard. Employers must provide any needed PPE. Employees must be trained on the use, limitation and care of all personal protective equipment they use.

The ideal situation is to eliminate hazards or exposures that employees encounter. Since this is not always possible, employers should use the best available methods to protect employees.

NYCAMH is a nongovernmental organization dedicated to the prevention of injury and illness that occurs to agricultural workers

Engineering controls combined with good work practices can, for the most part, provide maximum protection for employees. The employer is responsible to provide whatever training is necessary to ensure that their employees know how to use the system in place for protection.

### Safety and Health Training

Many OSHA standards explicitly require the employer to train employees in the safety and health aspects of their jobs. Other OSHA standards make it the employer's responsibility to limit certain job assignments to employees who are "certified competent" response or "qualified," meaning that they have had special previous training. This should be an essential part of every employer's program to protect workers from accidents and illnesses. It is well recognized that those who are new to a job have a higher rate of accidents and injuries than more experienced workers. This may be due to lack of training on specific job hazards and/or of proper work practices, and if so, training may help provide a solution.

It is a good safety and business practice for employers to keep records of all safety and health training provided; in some instances, it is mandatory. Records can provide evidence of the employer's good faith and compliance with OSHA standards. Also, documentation can supply an answer to one of the first questions an accident investigator will ask: "Was the injured employee properly trained to do the job?"

Training in the proper performance of a job is time and money well spent, and the employer should regard it as an investment rather than an expense. For an effective safety and health program, it is crucial that everyone at the workplace understands his/her role in the program, actively works to prevent and/or control hazards and potential hazards at the worksite, and the ways they should protect themselves when working around hazards. □

### References:

*Vermont Farm Safety Program, 2008*  
*On-Farm Safety Education & Training Pilot Program, Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety, 2007*  
*Cornell University Training Manual, 2006*  
*New York State Department of Labor Employer Guide & Model Safety & Health Accident Prevention Program, 2001*